

then it isn't the flashgun itself, but how you use it.

I'm a heavy user of flash - most of my photos have flash one way or another, .. but I try and hide that fact. I try to diffuse it or bounce it wherever possible, and shoot as little direct flash as I can, except outdoors where I try and use available light, and use flash only to lift the shadows and reduce the contrast.

btw, I loathe a noticable flash shadow.

Also, lose the diffuser cup / Stofen thingy if you can work without it.

Use available light to your advantage where you can, and just flash as a fill-in, dialling your exposure compensation way down.

These photos were all done with flash on camera ...

Shot at f2, with flash bounced directly behind me into the open room to just help lift the shadows. Note, there is NO flash shadow.



Flash bounced over my left shoulder.  
NO direct flash, and you won't see a flash shadow.  
A Stofen cup would've directed too much flash forward.



Flash bounced upwards into the church ceiling with just a bit of the white bounce card out. NO direct flash. And no Stofen crap either .. because it would've thrown too much direct flash forward.



Available light with a touch of fill-flash to lift the shadows.



Same here .. available light with flash to lift the shadows.  
But I exposed for the ambient light, and used the flash just to lift the shadows.



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Look at your flash manual it tells you the guide number goes from around 32 to 55 when you zoom in from 35mm to 105mm. That is about a little more than one stop. It is easy to figure out because f/32 to f/45 is one stop and guide numbers work just like f stops in terms of their power. So a guide number of 55 is a bit more than one stop.

But seriously folks, who is going to be zooming their flash head in and out as the flower girl walks down the aisle. Or even for more slow paced situations. I believe in the KISS principle (keep it simple stupid) Sure you'll get more power for that one shot, then a minute later you'll zoom out for a wide angle shot, forget to change the zoom back to a wide setting and get a spot lite ugly picture.

If half of the photographers out there could memorize what the flash to subject distances are for manual exposure at a given ISO the quality of pictures would dramatically increase. Yet everyone seems to be hung up on auto everything now a days.

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I work much like Neil. Not every wedding is the same so I won't pretend to say I use the same setup at each one but I use all canon gear but no canon flash. I use a Metz 60-ct4. It is a big potato masher style flash. I bounce and foof all day long. I hate the look of flash shadows and I avoid them every chance I get. I also tend to shoot at 1/15 of a second at the reception. It all depends on the lens and how much ambient light there is.

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Quote:

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I'm not sure why you're mentioning flash-to-subject distances and manual flash when we're talking about bounced flash.

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Bounced flash and their math computations are still completely relevant. It is still the same principle. If you bounce off a wall that is 10feet high and you are angled, it may be that your flash is traveling the distance of 30 feet then to reach your subject. Take into account the light loss from bouncing off something that doesn't reflect 100% of the light and presto you have your manual calculation.

Just because I am a light nerd I do know my manual calculations for my flash even when bouncing.

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Here specifically, is what I have against mindless use of the Stofen-type diffuser cup.

This was taken by a 2nd shooter I worked with on Sunday. I've explained this to him

numerous times before, and showed the effect to him .. but he still reverts to the 45' angled half-bounce with no regard for the position of the ceiling or subjects. So he ends up with this effect -- the top half is over-exposed (partly due to the dark suit and dress), and the bottom half of the vertical frame is darker.

Shooting vertically with a flash bracket, with the flash at 45' with a diffuser cup makes you look sooooo professional, until the images come back. ugh!

That Stofen thingy has its uses .. but this isn't one of them.  
Direct flash would've looked better than this.



A quick sto-fen question, if you don't mind. I just got one and am still learning how to use it. I understand your point of "bouncing off the clouds" and why you think it's useless, but wouldn't it still provide - even at 45' and sto-fen on - a soft fill for shadowed areas and bring some details maybe? I mean that small amount of the light that comes DIRECTLY from the flash?!? And by holding it at 45' you insure that it doesn't overpower ambient light?

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No it wouldn't soften it up. Maybe on a minuscule level but nothing we could see. The light source is still too small and specular with an omnibounce. The advantage of the omnibounce is that the light that comes out is dispersed in a 180 degree angle to hit any walls that are available to bounce off of. If there is nothing for the light to bounce off of then it is pointless to use it.

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... no, the diffuser cup does NOT soften light per se. It might scatter light, but in itself it doesn't give you softer light.

The reason for this is, as Brew mentioned, your lightsource is pretty much the same size with or without the diffuser cup. To get softer light, you need to have a larger light source. That is, a larger light source in relation to your subject and taking distance into account. The sun is a

phenomenally large light source, but it is a zillion miles away, and hence a pinpoint light source and therefore gives harsh shadows.

Your flashgun is also a small light source, and will therefore give harsh shadows if you just shoot directly without any thought. The only way to get softer light from a strobe, is to make your source of light larger either via an umbrella or diffuser PANEL or bouncing it off a wall or something.

If you're using the diffuser up indoors and bouncing your flash, the light from the strobe is scattered and bounces back from the walls and ceiling and that makes the flash light appear a little bit softer. But, too much light is still coming directly from the strobe head itself, and that is why it WILL look harsher than properly bounced flash.

Outdoors, using the flash in a 45' bounce position with a diffuser cup, makes very little sense, except for this :

- you need a wider spread of your strobe's light, since you're using a wide-angle lens. (This is valid for indoors as well.)
- you're working so close to the subject that you're outside the range of which your strobe (sans diffuser cup) can give you proper TTL range. Then the diffuser cup will help in pulling your strobe's output within a range that it can still give you properly metered TTL exposures.
- using the flash in a bounce position gives you an additional 2" height from your lens' axis. Maybe this helps you ?? Dunno.

I honestly can't think of any other reason to use the diffuser cup outside, especially in a bounce position. Using your flash outdoors in a 45' bounce position just needlessly eats battery power.

Where I do use the flash in a near -upright bounce position with (and sometimes without) the diffuser cup when there is no ceiling to bounce from ... is when I am shooting indoors with the 70-200 and I want to reduce the risk of red-eye. That extra 2 or 3 inches might just help somewhat there in reducing chances of red-eye, by getting my flash even further away from my lens axis.

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### Tip O' the Week - Quality Light w/On-Camera Flash by Dave Keiser

Knowing how to use light is probably the most important thing that professionals deal with in getting great shots. It's easy to light things up, but getting 'quality' light is another story.

Learning to use light takes time, thinking, and experience. And there are probably as many ways to light a subject as there are photographers. In the end, we're all looking for the best quality light available.

To portray one way to improve the quality of light at a wedding, check out the following image...



These two images were taken just moments apart using the same exposure, with an on camera flash using ETTL. Which one has better light? Obviously, the soft directional light of the image on the left is truly a more pleasing image. It looks more natural, 'softer', shows dimension and modeling with the light coming across the subjects from left to right.

**So what's the difference?** Simple: Just a turn of the flash head.



The image on the right was taken with the flash pointed directly at the couple. It has a flat look with all parts of them evenly lit. To get the image on the left, I simple turned my flash toward the ceiling, but *at an angle to the left*, in order for light to bounce back onto my subjects from the left.

Here's how my camera looks. Shooting in this fashion, I'm basically sending most of my light off camera. But some of the light still bounces back to my subject from the side--enough to get a good exposure, especially at higher iso's or larger aperatures. If I'm in a small enough room, I can even bounce directly off the walls to the side to create even more dramatic images.

### **Some pointers on angle bouncing your light:**

1. You need a powerful flash. The high end shoe mount flashes and most handle mount flashes have enough power to illuminate your image, even in good sized ballrooms.
2. Higher iso's are your friend. I shoot most receptions at 800 iso, staying at 400 iso if I can get a good expsosure.
3. High capacity, quick re-cycling batteries are important. And you'll need more than normal. I currently use 2400mah nimh rechargeable batteries. I can shoot about 150-300 images per set. You may also want to think about using a rechargeable pack for even faster recycling, etc.
4. To get the best light on people, angle the flash towards the side which the people are facing. If they are facing left, angle your flash to the left.
5. Mirrors will really mess up a side bounce. Avoid them to keep the soft light look.
6. Beams and other ceiling obstructions will also hamper your ability to bounce. Try to stay in the same 'beam section' of the room while bouncing.
7. Black ceilings are no fun. You can still bounce, but you'll get far less light as the black isn't very reflective.
8. Neutral colored ceilings (including beige) pose no real trouble, but a colored ceiling can be trouble and require a lot of color correction after the fact.

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Lot's of great questions. I'll try my best to answer...

### **Do you ever use an omnibounce?**

No. But that doesn't mean it's wrong. There are tons of ways to light the room. Brewphoto added a few other options. Adding gear is always an option and I'll discuss added a second strobe light just for adding dimension at the DWF convention and maybe in another tip. But the beauty of using simple gear (just the on camera flash) is that it's, well, simple!! The stofen omnibounce is a simple solution, too, and I'll be talking about it at the DWF seminar also.

### **Do you ever do a custom WB when there is a noticeably coloured ceiling?**

No, but that's a good idea!! I rarely come across colored ceilings. When I do, I'm apt to try something else like using the Lumiquest 80-20 pocket bouncer which still bounces, but adds front light which will minimize any color cast.



**How does it work with the camera rotated for portrait shots ?  
or do you just crop vertically ?**

Good question. I'm repositioning my flash head all the time, depending on where I want the light to go and what orientation I'm shooting. Because the shoe mount is on the top of the camera, you have to turn the camera right AND left in order to send light either way for a vertical shot. You get pretty used to doing it quickly after a while.

**I'll never forget him saying to me, "I'd bounce off the clouds if I could."**

Actually I stole that line from some photographers who shadowed me while on a wedding shoot in Cleveland.

**that is awesome dave! thanks for posting that. now question though...  
it obviously only works if they are near a wall in the direction you want to flash at,  
correct? so meaning, the image on the left has a wall in front of them, or at least  
near the fronts of them, right? so how would this apply in a large reception room?  
really curious.**

The shots shown are not close to a wall. The couple is actually standing on a stage, looking out into the medium sized reception room. The nearest wall to their left is about 80 feet away. I'm shooting at the ceiling, hoping just a little bit of light will bounce back my way. As you can see--it did. Try it out, you'll be surprised how easy it is to get away with. For large gymnasium size halls, I get out my Supak 622 flash which has a 200 gn rating. Otherwise, I'm happiest with the lighter on-camera flash.

**Another question ... what about the flashes output level. Do you have to change the setting from "0". I generally use it set at regular capacity because the flash is quite strong, but is there an advantage to taking it up the + side.**

Since I'm using ETTL, the flash is supposed to monitor the light coming into the camera and put out the correct light I need. Obviously, it's not always perfect, especially when your scene is mostly a white gown or a black tux. I find myself setting the flash at +1/3 or +2/3 stops quite often. By the way, even though I'm shooting ETTL, my camera is set to manual. I'm usually shooting at about f4 and between 1/30 and 1/80 shutter.

**This technique doesn't work so well on extreme wide lenses, i.e. 15mm to 20mm. What happens is the light coming from the flash bleeds into the upper right/left portion of the image. Also, you can't be too close to the subject or else you'll blow out that corner. I've had lots of shots where I have someone's head blown out but the rest of the group looks fine.**

Ken, thanks for adding that--you do have to look out for light bleeding perpendicular from the flash--the resulting images aren't too great!

**If you shoot on iso800, are you images filled with noise? I have been too afraid to do that unless the light is so low and no flash can be used. I shoot on iso 100 for almost everything. Should I start going up??? What about noise and image quality? HELP ME... I am afraid**

Brennan, all of the current digital cameras do a great job at the higher iso's. My 10D does great on 400 all the time. For 800 iso, you really need to get the exposure very close to get a great shot. Other cameras handle 1600 really well, too. And there are noise filters you can use if you need to get larger prints. Start with trying 400 iso and I think you'll be surprised!